

HON. JOHN C. COUGHENOUR

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
AT SEATTLE

NICOMEDES TUBAR, III,

Plaintiff,

v.

JASON CLIFT; and THE CITY OF  
KENT, WASHINGTON, a municipal  
corporation,

Defendants.

No. C05-1154 JCC

PLAINTIFF'S TRIAL BRIEF

Plaintiff hereby submits the following Trial Brief, for the jury trial set to be held in this case from May 14 to June 4, 2009.

**NATURE OF THE CASE**

This is a civil rights case against the City of Kent and a Kent police officer, Jason Clift. The lawsuit involves the shooting of plaintiff Nicomedes Tubar by defendant Officer Clift just after midnight on the night of June 25-26, 2003. The claims against Officer Clift are brought under brought under 28 U.S.C. § 1983; the claims against the City of Kent are brought under §1983 and Washington common law. See Complaint (Dkt. 1) ¶5; Order, (Dkt. 286) at 3-13.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS

In its Order Denying Defendant Jason Clift's Motion for Summary Judgment (Dkt. 156), the Court described the facts regarding the shooting of Nico Tubar and Heather Morehouse by Jason Clift as follows:

On June 25, 2003, Defendant Jason Clift, a City of Kent Police Officer, discovered a stolen 2001 Kia automobile in the parking lot of Plaintiff's apartment building. Defendant Clift decided to watch the vehicle because he believed that it had been driven recently. He placed a "rat trap" under one of the tires of the stolen vehicle, moved his patrol car out of sight, and hid in the bushes to await the driver's return. Approximately thirty minutes later, just after midnight on June 26, 2003, Defendant Clift observed Plaintiff, along with driver Heather Morehouse, exit the apartment building and enter the stolen vehicle. As Ms. Morehouse began backing the vehicle out of the parking spot, the rat trap punctured the vehicle's tires. At the same time, Defendant Clift emerged from the bushes with his flashlight and gun and announced that he was a police officer. Plaintiff and Ms. Morehouse did not hear this announcement nor realize that Defendant Clift was a police officer, but Defendant Clift thought that the vehicle occupants perceived him.

According to Plaintiff, Ms. Morehouse began driving toward the only exit at a "normal" speed--approximately 15 miles per hour<sup>1</sup> according to both parties as well as supporting testimony that indicates that the vehicle was not going very fast. Ms. Morehouse steered towards the exit of the parking lot, in what Plaintiff characterizes as a "steady right turn." In contrast, Defendant Clift maintains that it was a "sharp U-Turn" to the right. The tire puncture due to the rat trap caused the rim of the front passenger tire to mark the pavement as the vehicle moved, providing evidence of the Kia's path consistent with a steady right turn. Nevertheless, Defendant Clift's version of events is that Ms. Morehouse steered the car toward him, accelerated, and put him in fear for his life. However, Plaintiff claims that the car decelerated as events unfolded and that Ms. Morehouse consistently steered toward the parking lot exit and never accelerated toward Defendant Clift in an attempt to hit him. While Defendant Clift originally claimed that the car "swerved" toward him, none of the evidence indicates a "swerve" and Defendant Clift now seems to have retreated from that theory. Nevertheless, during the vehicle's undisputed curved path, it is clear that at some point the car was headed directly toward where Defendant Clift was standing, though the parties dispute how long this was.

As the car approached the parking lot exit, Defendant Clift fired his weapon at the vehicle three times. The first two bullets entered the hood and front windshield of the

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<sup>1</sup> Although plaintiff accepted *arguendo* the defendants' lowest estimate of 15 m.p.h., plaintiff's evidence will indicate that the speed could have been as low as 10 m.p.h. or less. See Dkt. 272-2 at 2.

1 vehicle but did not strike either Ms. Morehouse or Plaintiff. Defendant Clift fired his  
2 third shot as the vehicle was passing him. This third bullet entered through the driver's  
3 side window and struck Plaintiff in the upper left shoulder area. According to Plaintiff's  
expert, by the time the third shot was fired, the Kia was moving at about 6 miles per hour  
and visibly decelerating....

4 It is undisputed that the three shots were fired in a matter of seconds. One witness  
described the succession of shots as "'bang, bang' (pause) 'bang.'" ... It is undisputed that  
5 the third shot is the one that hit Plaintiff and that it came through the side of the car as it  
was passing Defendant Clift. According to Defendant Clift, he stopped firing when he  
6 perceived that the car was no longer a threat to him. Defendant Clift argues that all three  
shots were reasonable under the circumstances. According to Plaintiff, the car could not  
7 have been a threat when the third shot was fired, yet Defendant Clift kept firing his  
weapon at a car that was passing him. Plaintiff argues that Defendant Clift was never in  
8 danger and that none of the three shots was reasonable. Plaintiff further argues that,  
regardless of the reasonableness of the first two shots, the third shot was unreasonable  
9 under the circumstances because of the gap between shots two and three and because of  
the clearly nonthreatening position of the car at the time the third shot was fired.

10 In its Order Denying Kent's Motion for Summary Judgment the Court gave the following  
11 summary of the evidence regarding Kent's liability on a *Monell* theory of ratification:

12 Officer Clift was also involved in two other shooting incidents prior to the June  
13 2003 incident. The first incident occurred in November 2000 and involved Guadalupe  
Martinez, who was stopped in heavy traffic after leading police on a high speed  
14 chase.... Witnesses stated that Martinez emerged from the vehicle with what appeared to  
be a large-caliber handgun, which she pointed at Officer Clift, who had approached the  
15 driver's door.... Both Clift and another Kent officer fired their weapons, and Martinez  
was killed.... Subsequently, it was determined that the gun Martinez displayed was a  
16 pellet gun.... The Auburn Police Department investigated the circumstances of the  
shooting and concluded that Officer Clift shot Martinez in self-defense.... Thereafter,  
17 Kent Police Chief Ed Crawford found that Clift's use of force was justified and officially  
"exonerated" him of any wrongdoing....

18 The second shooting incident occurred in May 2002 following a high speed  
19 chase.... Officers had stopped a vehicle because the driver, Eric Jackson, had an  
outstanding felony warrant.... The vehicle also had a female passenger, Kristina Howe....  
20 Jackson struggled with the officers as they attempted to take him into custody, and he  
managed to escape back to his vehicle where he sped away.... During the chase, Officer  
21 Clift employed a Pursuit Intervention Tactic, which involved impacting the fleeing  
vehicle and forcing it to come to a stop.... As a Federal Way officer approached the  
22 stopped vehicle, Jackson apparently revved the engine.... Clift and two other officers  
claimed that Jackson was attempting to run over the approaching officer.... The three  
23 officers then fired their weapons at the vehicle, hitting Jackson and Howe, both of whom

1 suffered non-fatal injuries.... After an internal review, Chief Crawford again found that  
2 Clift's use of force was justified and "exonerated" him....

3 As in the two previous shootings, Chief Crawford ultimately exonerated Officer  
4 Clift from any wrongdoing in the shooting incident at issue in the instant lawsuit.  
5 Immediately after the shooting, Clift gave a brief oral report to his sergeant and was then  
6 taken to the Kent police station to meet with his union representative and attorney....  
7 Chief Crawford then placed Clift on administrative leave and referred the incident to the  
8 Auburn Police Department for an investigation.... The Chief also sent Clift to a  
9 psychologist for an evaluation of his fitness to return to duty.... After being ordered by  
10 the Deputy Police Chief to provide a statement, Clift submitted a written statement of the  
11 incident on July 8, 2003, nearly two weeks after the incident.... On July 10, 2003, Clift  
12 gave a recorded interview to Auburn investigators in the presence of his attorney....  
13 Subsequently, the Kent Police Department conducted its own internal review of Officer  
14 Clift's use of deadly force.... The internal review noted that Clift had not submitted a Use  
15 of Force Report as required, but concluded that he had acted in compliance with Police  
16 Department policies in discharging his firearm.... Specifically, the internal review found  
17 that Clift properly employed deadly force upon believing that he was in immediate  
18 danger of death or serious injury.... Thereafter, Chief Crawford found that Officer Clift  
19 was "justified, acted lawfully, properly, and within grounds of accepted police conduct"  
20 in using deadly force, and therefore, Clift was "exonerated." ...

21 Dkt. 286 at 3-4 (record citations omitted).

22 In addition to the evidence of these prior shootings and Kent's ratification of them,  
23 plaintiff's *Monell* and negligence claims against the City of Kent are based in part on evidence of  
24 inadequacies in Kent's supervision of Officer Clift and other officers regarding their use of  
force.<sup>2</sup> This evidence includes evidence that Kent and its former Police Chief, Ed Crawford,  
Kent's policymaker in such matters, failed generally to supervise and discipline officers to  
prevent improper uses of force. *See* Plaintiff's Opp. to Kent's Renewed MPSJ (Dkt. 211) at 15-  
18. Instead, when faced with incidents of the improper or unnecessary use of force or deadly  
force by his officers and related discipline problems, Kent and Chief Crawford's goal appears to

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22 <sup>2</sup> As noted below, because the negligence and *Monell*/supervision claims are based on the  
23 same evidence and largely overlapping, and because of the complexity of both sets of law (state  
24 and federal) controlling these claims, plaintiff may at trial elect to dismiss his negligence claim if  
the Court finds the evidence sufficient to submit the *Monell*/supervision claim to the jury.

1 have been avoiding civil liability and police union problems, rather than protecting the public  
2 and preventing violations of constitutional rights.

3 The evidence plaintiff will present of this policy of disregard will include testimony from  
4 several of Chief Crawford's top staff, including his immediate (interim) successor, about his  
5 informal policies and management practices, as well as documentary and other evidence about  
6 Chief Crawford's actions and decisions surrounding and following each of Jason Clift's three  
7 shootings. Ibid.; see also Plaintiff's Opp. Motion in Limine (Dkt. 269) at 3-7. This evidence  
8 will establish an unusually direct causal link between these policies and practices and the  
9 shooting of Nico Tubar. Because, as the Court has noted, Chief Crawford not only failed to take  
10 corrective disciplinary action after Officer Clift's prior shootings, he commended them. He  
11 ignored an explicit warning from a psychologist that Officer Clift needed counseling after the  
12 first shooting and—according to Officer Clift—he responded to the concerns of officers and  
13 supervisors about Officer Clift's emotional condition by swearing at Clift and threatening to fire  
14 him, at the same time conveying to Clift the (we believe accurate) impression that his suspension  
15 and psychological examinations were for political cover. Consistent with that impression, Kent  
16 sent Officer Clift to a psychologist who had never seen him before, who was not informed of  
17 crucial facts—like the fact that Officer Clift had broken a previous commitment to get  
18 counseling, that he had been taken off duty and placed on administrative leave, that he had left  
19 his home, and that his police officer wife was seeking a civil protection order against him—and  
20 requested only a limited evaluation. As a consequence of this limited information and  
21 assignment, Kent's chosen psychologist (who is now also its expert witness, Dr. Norman J. Mar),  
22 apparently did not report to Kent the fact that testing of Officer Clift showed him to be at "high  
23 risk" of problems, including anger and integrity problems. Officer Clift was put back to work,  
24 and less than a week later he shot Nico Tubar and Heather Morehouse—in what plaintiffs  
experts will say was yet another display of arrest and firearm use tactics that was recklessly

1 improper at best, and in what the defendants' experts contend was a state of panic in which  
 2 Officer Clift was unable to stop shooting when he clearly was out of danger.

3 After the shooting, Chief Crawford and Kent ignored obvious signs that Clift was at fault  
 4 and his story made no sense, never conducted a real investigation of his actions, but instead  
 5 began building a defense against civil liability, for him and for the City—keeping outside  
 6 investigators from questioning Officer Clift, getting another psychological clearance for him  
 7 (again from Dr. Mar), ignoring obvious inconsistencies in Officer Clift's version of the events  
 8 and unequivocally endorsing that version and Clift's conduct (even conduct in direct violation of  
 9 Kent written policies) although it was the subject of a pending criminal court case (a case Kent  
 10 sought to influence to produce a guilty plea it is still trying to use in its civil defense).

11 Plaintiff will call two expert witnesses who will testify to the inadequacy of this  
 12 supervision and its relation to this incident. *See* Dkt. 40; Dkt. 200.

### 13 **PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND AND PRIOR RULINGS**

14 The Court has issued numerous rulings in this case, and one of them—a motion for  
 15 partial summary judgment on the basis of qualified immunity brought by defendant Clift—has  
 16 been upheld on appeal.

17 The Orders previously entered by the Court that plaintiff believes may impact issues and  
 18 procedures at trial include the following:

- 19 • Order Denying Summary Judgment on Qualified Immunity (Dkt. 156)
- 20 • Order Disclosing Telephone Records (Dkt. 172)
- 21 • Order Regarding Trial Setting and Pretrial Procedure (Dkt. 183)
- 22 • Order Modifying Protection Order (Dkt. 222)
- 23 • Order Granting Motion to Compel City of Kent to Produce its Evaluations of Use of  
 24 Force by Jason Clift (Dkt. 235)
- Order Denying Kent's and Plaintiff's Motions for Summary Judgment (Dkt. 286)
- Order Regarding Trial and Related Dates (Dkt. 299)

- Order Denying Bifurcation (Dkt. 300)
- Minute Order Regarding Motions in Limine (Dkt. 301)
- Minute Order Regarding Trial Length (Dkt. 302)
- Minute Order Resetting Trial (Dkt. 304)
- Minute Order (Dkt. 305)

The Court has still pending, to be ruled on, the following additional motions:

- Plaintiff's Motion in Limine Regarding Indemnification and Collateral Source, and Other Issues (Dkt. 249)
- Plaintiff's Motion in Limine to Exclude Evidence of Non-Party Heather Morehouse's *Alford* Plea (Dkt. 250)
- Plaintiff's Motion in Limine to Limit the Testimony of Dr. William Lewinsky (Dkt. 253)
- Defendants' Motions in Limine on various subjects (Dkt. 239)
- Defendants' Motion to Exclude Testimony of D.P. Van Blaricom (Dkt. 244)
- Defendants' Motion to Exclude Certain Testimony of A. Abrous, Ph.D. (Dkt. 246)
- Defendants' Motion to Quash Subpoena Duces Tecum Directed to City Attorney Arthur "Pat" Fitzpatrick (Dkt. 307) (filed May 5, 2009).

## TRIAL PROCEDURE

### 1. Jury Selection

Plaintiff believes that this case may need some extra time and care in jury selection, because of the sensitive issues it raises. Plaintiff has separately submitted a list of proposed voir dire questions. The subjects of those questions all relate directly to the incidents in this case and involve issues that are likely to be significant and on which jurors' personal opinions and experiences may need to be screened. Some of these deal with core facts of the case, such as questions about police officers and police work, car theft and stolen cars, and firearms and gunshots. Other questions have to do with less central issues that nonetheless are likely to come up in trial and may be sensitive or touch on particular jurors' individual experiences. These



1 include the issue of manic depression, and the use of the medication Lithium, which the evidence  
2 will indicate may have influenced Heather Morehouse's behavior in the incident in question.  
3 [Others?]

## 4 **2. Allotment and Division of Available Trial Time**

5 The Court has instructed the parties that Thursday, May 14, 2009, will be devoted to  
6 announcement of the Court's rulings on pending motions, voir dire and jury selection, and  
7 opening statements. Testimony will begin on May 15, 2009, and the case will go to the jury on  
8 or before June 4, 2009. Court will not be held on May 26, 2009.

9 The Court's schedule provides for thirteen (13) trial days, on each of which court will be  
10 in session for five hour (two hours and fifteen minutes in the mornings and two hours and forty-  
11 five minutes in the afternoons). That is a total of sixty-five (65) hours of court time. The Court  
12 has indicated that it will allot the time equally between the two parties.

13 Plaintiff therefore suggests that each party be allotted thirty (30) hours of total time for  
14 testimony, cross-examination, and closing argument. That would leave five hours total  
15 unallotted time, to address other court business as necessary. Plaintiff asks that a timekeeper be  
16 assigned, and that the parties compare calculations with the timekeeper each day to make sure all  
17 parties and the Court are apprised and aware of the allotted time remaining to each.

18 If it elects to use some other method of time allocation, plaintiff asks that the Court *not*  
19 simply allot a certain number of days or hours to the plaintiff's case and a certain number of days  
20 or hours to the defendants' case. The parties have agreed that to the extent it is possible without  
21 disrupting the flow of the case, defendants will conduct a direct examination of witnesses called  
22 by the plaintiff, when plaintiff calls them, so witnesses will not have to return to testify twice.  
23 Because of that, and because of the possibility that cross-examination of some witnesses could  
24 be more extensive than direct, each party will likely be using a substantial portion of the other



1 party's case, for its own questioning. Because of that, it would be unfair to hold parties  
2 responsible for all time used on particular days or with particular witnesses.

### 3           **3. Exhibits.**

4           The admissibility of a large number of identified exhibits has been agreed to. Plaintiff  
5 will ask the Court to admit those exhibits at the outset of the case, to avoid delay or waste of time  
6 in identifying them prior to admission. Plaintiff anticipates using a small number of agreed-to  
7 exhibits—primarily, drawings and photographs of the incident scene—in opening statement. If  
8 the Court permits that, plaintiff will identify those exhibits he will be using in opening, in  
9 advance of trial, to permit defendants to make any objection to that use. Plaintiff asks that  
10 defendants be required to do the same.

11           A number of the exhibits are documents that have been disclosed in discovery, but are  
12 arguably subject to a protective order. Plaintiff assumes that the protective order will be,  
13 expressly or effectively, modified by the Court's rulings on motions *in limine*, so that any exhibit  
14 or evidence the Court finds admissible will be exempt from that Order, so it can be offered into  
15 evidence and submitted to the jury.

### 16           **3. Opening Statement.**

17           Plaintiff understands that opening statements will be completed on May 14, 2009, and  
18 that testimony will not begin until May 15, 2009.

19           In addition to this traditional opening statement, plaintiff suggests that because of the  
20 length and relative complexity of this trial, it might be helpful to the jury to allot a short amount  
21 of time—perhaps twenty minutes—to each side for extended opening statement, to be delivered  
22 as each party chooses, during its case at trial. Such extended opening statements were suggested  
23 and allowed by Judge Robert Bryan of this Court in a complex and lengthy civil rights trial  
24 plaintiff's counsel was involved in some years ago (*see Davis v. Mason County*, 927 F.2d 1473  
(9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1991)), and the device appeared to be quite helpful to the jury.

1           **4. Notice of Anticipated Witnesses.**

2           The parties have discussed, but have not yet reached, an agreement regarding notification  
3 of the opposing counsel of the witnesses each side intends to call, before the day on which they  
4 are called. Unless the parties reach some different agreement in advance of trial, plaintiff would  
5 ask that the Court require each side to identify the witnesses it intends to call on each trial day,  
6 two days in advance. Plaintiff believes that such a notification schedule allows adequate notice  
7 and at the same time reasonable certainty and flexibility in witness scheduling.

8                           **ANTICIPATED EVIDENTIARY ISSUES**

9           The key evidentiary issues plaintiff anticipates will arise at trial are addressed the  
10 Motions in Limine and Responses thereto that have been filed by both sides. Plaintiffs'  
11 submissions on these issues include Plaintiff's Motion Regarding Indemnification and Collateral  
12 Source, and Other Issues (Dkt. 249, and Reply Dkt. 283), Plaintiff's Motion to Exclude Evidence  
13 of Morehouse's Alford Plea (Dkt. 250, and Reply Dkt. 282), Plaintiff's Motion to Limit the  
14 Testimony of Dr. William Lewinsky (Dkt. 253, and Reply Dkt. 285), Plaintiff's Response to  
15 Defendants' Omnibus Motions in Limine (Dkt. 269, and Supp. 306), Plaintiff's Response to  
16 Defendants' Motion to Exclude Testimony of D.P. Van Blaricom (Dkt. 256), and Plaintiff's  
17 Defendants' Motion to Exclude Certain Testimony of A. Abrous, Ph.D. (Dkt. 246).

18           Plaintiff will provide authorities on those or other evidentiary issues that become evident  
19 during trial, in pocket briefing during trial, as the issues arise or as the Court instructs.

20                           **ANTICIPATED LEGAL ISSUES**

21           Pursuant to local rule, the parties are submitting herewith a Joint Statement of Disputed  
22 Jury Instructions (Dkt. 319), which contain authority on most of the legal issues that should  
23 affect jury instructions and trial issues.

24           In addition, relevant authority is contained in the parties' various summary judgment  
memoranda and the Court's rulings on those motions.

1 The first of those Motions was Defendant Clift's Motion for Summary Judgment on  
2 Qualified Immunity, which the Court of course denied. Dkt.156. The affirmance of that ruling  
3 by the Ninth Circuit resolves the issue of qualified immunity, which of course is a legal issue for  
4 the Court and not a trial defense.

5 The second of those Motions was plaintiff's Motion for Partial Summary Judgment on  
6 Unreasonable Seizure, which the Court denied because of evidentiary disputes. See Dkt. 286 at  
7 13-16. That Motion argued that Officer Clift's conduct in running in front of the Morehouse car  
8 with gun drawn and pointed, and then firing rather than stepping out of the way, constituted an  
9 unreasonable seizure as a matter of law. See Motion, Dkt. 190. Although the Court found the  
10 pretrial evidence insufficiently conclusive to warrant such a ruling, plaintiff anticipates that the  
11 issue will come up again in a motion for partial judgment as a matter of law or for a directed  
12 verdict on the issue, because he believes that the trial evidence will show that Officer Clift's  
13 behavior, objectively viewed, clearly was a seizure and clearly was unreasonable, and that the  
14 defense protestations to the contrary are both incredible and irrelevant. See *id.*; Dkt. 219. They  
15 are irrelevant because "inquiry that under the Fourth Amendment always depends upon objective  
16 factors and not upon sincerity of belief." *Price v. Sery*, 513 F.3d 962, 967 (9th Cir. 2008).  
17 Moreover, the determinative factor regarding whether there has been a seizure is the view of the  
18 person seized, not the officer. "[W]hether an arrest has occurred depends upon an objective, not  
19 subjective, evaluation of what a person innocent of a crime would have thought of the situation,  
20 given all of the factors involved." *United States v. Al-Azzawy*, 784 F.2d 890, 892-93 (9th  
21 Cir.1985) (citing *United States v. Johnson*, 626 F.2d 753, 755-56 (9th Cir.1980), *aff'd on other*  
22 *grounds*, 457 U.S. 537 (1982). And reasonableness is measured objectively, not according to  
23 subjective report or belief. See, e.g., *Acosta v. City and County of San Francisco*, 83 F.3d 1143,  
24 1145 (9th Cir. 1996)

1 The third motions the Court has ruled on were Kent's Motions for Partial Summary  
2 Judgment, which the Court also denied with respect to both plaintiff's *Monell* and state law  
3 negligence claims. Dkt. 286. Because the Court found ratification, it did not find it necessary in  
4 that order to determine whether plaintiff had also presented sufficient evidence of supervisory  
5 indifference to submit to a jury. *Id.* at 11n.6.

6 Plaintiff believes there is overwhelming evidence of supervisory indifference in this case,  
7 more than enough to support a separate *Monell* liability theory based on supervision. See pages  
8 4-5 above, and memoranda there cited. If the Court finds that evidence sufficient to go to the  
9 jury, plaintiff will likely move to dismiss his state law negligence claim, as the two liability  
10 theories are largely redundant and—as the ar both are sufficiently complex that submitting both  
11 of them to the jury may prove overly confusing.

12 DATED this 7 day of May, 2009.

13 Respectfully submitted,

14 MacDONALD HOAGUE & BAYLESS

15 By /s/Timothy K. Ford

16 Timothy K. Ford, WSBA #5986

17 Joseph R. Shaeffer, WSBA #33273

18 Attorneys for Plaintiff

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on the 8th day of May, 2009, at approximately 12:03 a.m., I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system which will send electronic notification of such filing to:

Steven L. Thorsrud [sthorsrud@kbmlawyers.com](mailto:sthorsrud@kbmlawyers.com)  
Mary Ann McConaughy [mmcconaughey@kbmlawyers.com](mailto:mmcconaughey@kbmlawyers.com)

/s/Timothy K. Ford